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DEPARTMENT OF ARMS  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

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Joseph Memorandum

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Release

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

...negotiations. The fourth Thompson-Gromyko talk took place February 9 ...initiative. Moscow's position as expounded in the memorandum ...by Gromyko, and by Gromyko himself, tended to be more rigid than had ...been the case in the previous exchanges, but again the Soviet Foreign Minister ...carefully made no attempt to end the talks.

Soviet propaganda media continued to insist the West was procrastinating and making no real effort to find a "common sense" approach to the issues at hand; instead the West allegedly had adopted the tactic of remaining inflexible while "waiting until some kind of concessions are laid at their feet." There was also increasing attention in the bloc media to various aspects of the European security problem in relation to the German question; one Soviet commentary on the Zapacki Plan hinted at an atom free zone in Central Europe as a possible alternative to a German peace treaty.

Threats of a separate peace treaty are again being voiced by East German second-level spokesmen and have appeared in several Moscow commentaries intended for foreign consumption. However, the threat has been conspicuously absent in Ulbricht's recent statements and from top level Soviet utterances. References to a treaty "headline" continue to be absent from both public and private bloc statements.

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. No changes in the Soviet or bloc military posture related to Germany were reported during the past week.

Soviet efforts to reserve flight space in the Berlin air corridors for varying periods during the mornings of February 8, 9 and 14 were met with immediate Allied counteraction in the form of special flights of Allied military aircraft in the corridors during the periods in question. The Soviet controller at the Berlin Air Safety Center (BASC) informed his colleagues on each occasion that the corridor air space up to 7,000 feet was being reserved for Soviet military transport use. (February 8, the reservation applied only to the south corridor, February 9 and 14 to the north and central ones.) A similar reservation for February 12 was cancelled early the same morning, apparently because of poor flying conditions. During the periods in question, there were no indications of normal air maneuvers, but considerable Soviet flight activity near and in the corridors was observed. Allied aircraft flying during the "reserved" periods encountered minor jamming and electronic interference, and some Soviet military aircraft were seen making passes and bussing.

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A Soviet embassy official in East Berlin insisted there had been no attempt to "reserve" air space and ICAO flight corridors; the air corridors to Berlin was merely exercising its right to fly in the corridors as it saw fit. Should other aircraft attempt to fly at the same time, the official continued, responsibility for accidents would rest with the Allies. February 14, the Soviet B-50 controller informed his allied counterparts that the USSR would consider any planes flying at altitudes planned for Soviet flights as trespassers with the resulting consequences." He later protested the Allied flights as "violations of established procedures" and demanded they be stopped.

Berlin and Germany. Although no actual interruptions of access to or within Berlin occurred during the past week, interzonal train traffic is now apparently being restricted to a single-tracked line for entry into West Berlin. Since mid-December, all trains to or from the F.R.G, including Allied military trains, have been funnelled into West Berlin via the one Griebnitzsee-Wannsee route, heretofore a double-tracked line. February 11 the GDR removed both the rails and ties of the former inbound track on this route, apparently limiting all interzonal rail traffic to the one remaining line.

Allied military trains to Berlin continue to encounter delays, generally occasioned by GDR insistence that the trains arriving from the F.R.G are too heavy for the Reichsbahn engines. The Soviet commandant in East Berlin has answered US protests with the counteraccusation the trains were late in arriving at Helmestedt and were improperly made up in the F.R.G.

Soviet Commandant Soloviev attempted to enter West Berlin via the Friedrichstrasse checkpoint February 8, ostensibly to deliver a communication to the British commandant. Ignoring a British warning that the US ban on his entry into the American sector was still in effect and that he should enter West Berlin via the British sector, Soloviev insisted on using the Friedrichstrasse crossing. When the car was stopped at the US checkpoint, he returned to East Berlin in high dudgeon, cancelling his visit to British headquarters. February 14, however, Soloviev complied with British advice and carried out his original mission, entering West Berlin by a crossing point in the British sector.

GDR spokesmen have asserted that special international flights from Italy to Leipzig will be instituted for the occasion of the March Leipzig Fair to handle the "numerous" Italian visitors who wish to attend the Fair.

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ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

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Current Soviet tactics both in the Moscow talks and on the Berlin scene appear at this point to be coordinated to demonstrate to the West its vulnerability in Berlin. The present rigidity of the Soviet negotiating stance, together with the sudden moves to harass traffic in the Berlin air corridors, seem designed primarily to pressure the West into a more yielding attitude regarding an agreement on West Berlin.

Should the Soviets fail to achieve this result and conclude the present exchanges are unlikely to lead to any agreement on Berlin, the same intransigence could also be utilized to force an impasse on the Berlin question in the current talks in order to shift the focus of discussion from Berlin alone to other issues. Khrushchev's proposal for a summit-type conference in connection with the 12-nation disarmament meeting in March may represent a preparatory move in this latter direction as may the increasing Soviet emphasis on European security matters.

Above and beyond these broader aims, the Soviet corridor action is likely also to prove to be an attempt to change the existing BASIC procedures governing air traffic to Berlin. Even if Soviet demands in this regard are rejected, the USSR may calculate its show of force will in the long run add to the deterioration of morale in West Berlin and also gradually discourage the civil air lines from "business as usual" on the Berlin run.

GDR actions in delaying Allied trains and in further restricting German train traffic to Berlin would seem to be another facet in the series of planned and/or preparatory GDR measures for harassing access to Berlin. The action with respect to the Allied trains appears as yet to be of a probing nature rather than the preliminary to serious pressure.

Though we do not believe the Soviets contemplate bringing the question of access to West Berlin to a head in the immediate future, this does not preclude a Soviet effort to step up the present level of harassments and probes cited above. Such a decision would depend on a number of factors, in particular the nature of the Western response to the initial pressures.

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